DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 338 137 HE 024 978

AUTHOR Branch, Robert; And Others
TITLE A Systems Approach to Selecting an Internship.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 13p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Decision Making; Educational Planning; Evaluation Methods; *Field Experience Programs; Goal Orientation; Higher Education; *Internship Programs; Job Placement; Organizational Climate; Skill Development; Student Educational Objectives; *Student Improvement; Student Placement; *Systems Approach

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a model for use by college students and their advisors as they consider an off-campus internship within business or industry as part of a degree program. The following six components of the systems model as applied to internships are explained: (1) identifying student career goals; (2) investigating potential host environments; (3) reviewing selective intern positions; (4) developing the terms of the internship; (5) participating in the internship; and (6) doing a post-internship review. Also briefly reviewed are basic rules students can use to determine the appriateness of a potential placement. These strategies include taking personal inventory of personal strengths and weaknesses, listing personal goals or experiences desired from the internship experience, sharing these with managers and supervisors, and researching the host organization's structure and operations. It is noted that a systematic investigation of the benefits of an internship as well as common caveats can increase the potential for a successful match between the goals of the individual and the mission of the host organization. (GLR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

HE

A Systems Approach to Selecting an Internship

ED338187

Robert C. Branch
Department of Instructional Design, Development and Evaluation
Syracuse University

Richard Couch
School of Education
Clarion University

Michael A. Orey
Department of Instructional Technology
The University of Georgia

HE 024 978

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Robert C. Branch

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Paper presented at the annual conference of the Association of Educational Communications and Technology, Orlando, Florida, 1991.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

This model is intended for use by students and their advisors as they consider an off-campus internship as part of a degree program. The six components of the model are: (1) identify your career goals, (2) investigate potential host environments, (3) review selective intern positions, (4) develop the terms of the internship, (5) do the internship, and (6) do a post-internship review. A systematic investigation of the benefits of an internship as well as common caveats can increase the potential for a successful match between the goals of the individual and the mission of the host organization. This presentation is based on the experiences and perceptions of the authors, each of whom has interned at various private enterprises.[1]

[1] At the original draft of this paper Rob Branch, Rich Couch and Mike Orey were doctoral candidates in the College of Education at Virginia Tech. Each interned at a major private enterprise for at least one semester during 1988. This paper is based on their individual experiences and describes their perceptions of systematically selecting an internship.

A Systems Approach to Selecting an Internship

This article presents a strategy for students and their major advisors to consider when selecting an off-campus internship within business or industry as part of a degree program. An intern is an advanced student or recent graduate assigned to a company or institution so as to undergo supervised practical training in a specific area of work. An internship that emphasizes performance can be a major skills acquisition experience as well as a confidence building vehicle in the developmental process of the student. A successful internship experience occurs when the individual and the host organization establish a relatively congenial match between the goals of the individual and the needs of the host organization. A mismatch between the student's goals and the host organization's mission often devalues the experience for both parties. This situation is often manifested in negative perceptions about the field of study, the academic preparation of the individual and the value of the host organization. A selection strategy that is systematically designed can avoid gross misalignments and increase the potential for a positive intern-host organization relationship. A discussion of all the assets and liabilities of an internship is beyond the scope of this paper, however, what follows is an overview of seven basic rules students can use to determine the potential of a good fit, and a description of a systematic approach for selecting an internship.

Seven Basic Rules

Snyder (1984) presented seven rules to follow for an effective internship. First, "Know Thyself." Take a personal inventory of your work style, strengths, weaknesses and prior experience. List at least three goals that you want to reach or identify the experiences that you want to have during the internship. Second, "Explore Thy Opportunities." Thoroughly investigate the spectrum of available intern opportunities. There are three paradigms of an internship: (1) Probation - where the host organization wants the intern on a trial basis with the option of hiring at the end of the internship, (2) Training - the host organization may be looking for future recruits, usually students who have not completed their program of study, and (3) Temporary - which occurs when the host organization wants expertise, but will neither hire a consultant nor set up a full-time position.

Third, "Manage Thy Internship." Make sure your managers and supervisors are aware of your goals. Fourth, "Communicate Thy Needs." Let your supervisor know if you need more, or less, direction. Fifth, "Tap Thy Knowledge." Take initiative, think and don't be afraid to maké mistakes. Sixth, "Meet Thy Colleagues." Network, ask questions of your colleagues and seek those with common interests. Seventh, "Analyze Thy Environment." Research the host organization's history. Understand the roles of various personnel and identify several of the typical career paths within the host organization. By developing a strategy or plan of action you can increase your potential for success during such a learning event as an internship. By employing an instructional development approach, students considering an internship can develop a formative strategy. Figure 1 presents a systems model for selecting an internship.

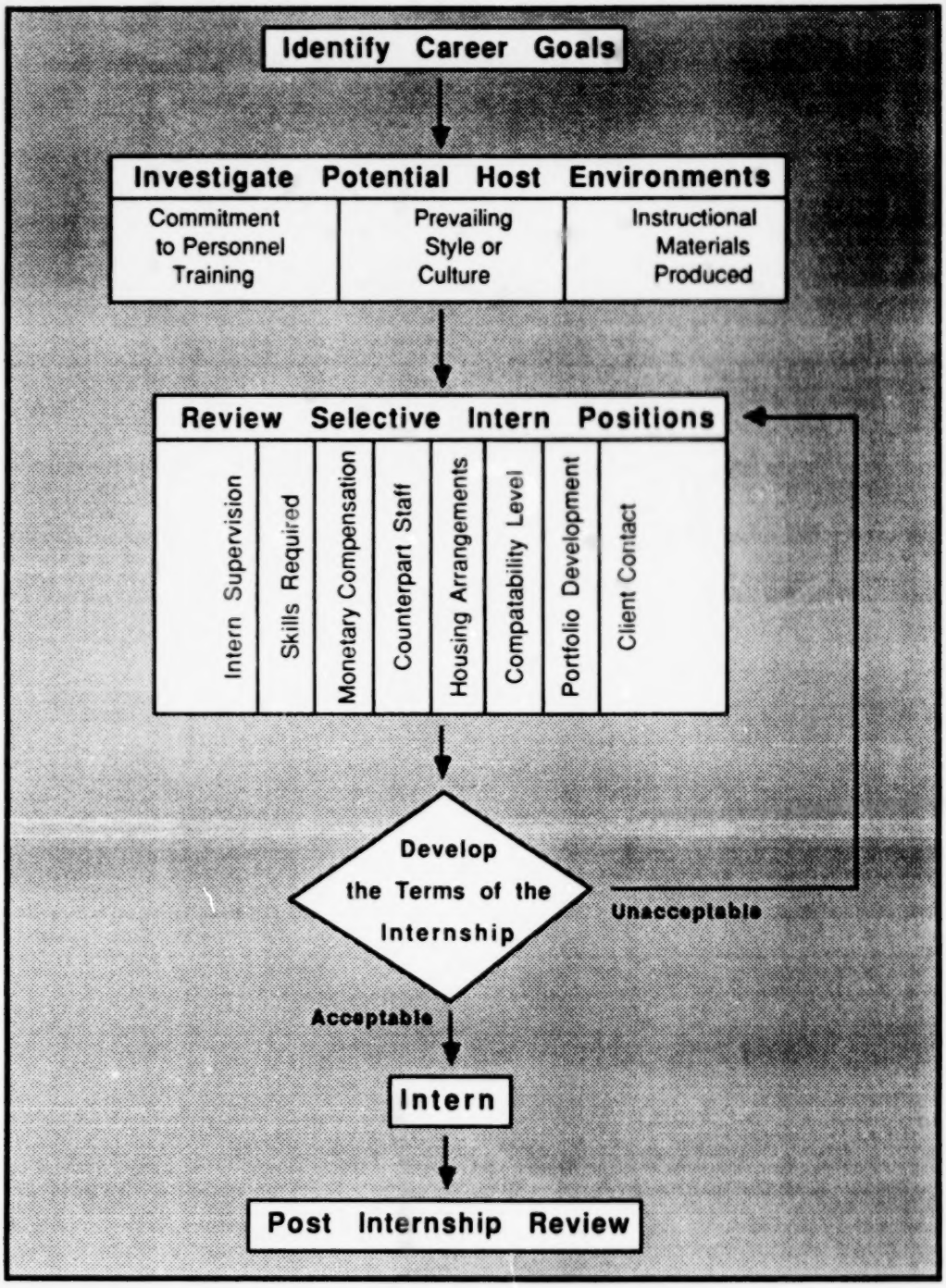

Figure 1. Internship Selection Model

Selecting an Internship: A Systems Model

Step #1: Identify Career Goals. For the student, this is the most important component of the model and will determine, to a large extent, the success of the internship. Begin by determining your personal and professional objectives. Write down a list of goals and experiences you desire to achieve and which you feel will contribute to your knowledge base. We recommend you revisit your goal statements regularly in order to serve as formative evaluations throughout the selection process. Your goal statements will provide direction as you begin the next phase - the initial acquisition of relevant information.

Step #2: Investigate Potential Host Environments. This step is the initial information acquisition phase and is based on your desired outcomes of the internship experience. A student considering an internship in business or industry should remember that the goals and financial structures of private enterprise and academia differ significantly. Through written correspondence and telephone conversation you can learn about prospective host organizations. You can clarify the role training plays in the overall scheme of the host organization. You can gather information regarding the commitment of resources allocated for personnel training. The testimony of former interns who have worked at a particular enterprise is often valuable. It is also valuable to identify the "style" or "culture" that prevails in a host organization. You can do this by identifying specific methods of operation that have been adopted by the host organization, and by reviewing typical materials they produce. In addition, secure an outline of the basic intern duties and responsibilities that you can expect to assume. For example, knowing that the internship is basically a "catch-all" position, or that your duties are going to be mostly clerical in nature, will allow you to make an informed decision about a potential position. The type of questions that can assist you acquire this kind of information are:

1. Is this an existing intern program?
2. Is the internship paid or unpaid?
3. Is the internship full-time or part-time?
4. Will there be overtime situations? if so,
5. What arrangements have been provided for overtime?
6. Is the internship period short-term or long-term?
7. What is the extent of intern supervision?
8. To what extent is the team approach used on development projects?
9. What would be my primary duties and responsibilities?
10. What kind of research and development is the organization committed to?
11. How long does it typically take from project conception to implementation?
12. Is there a specified dress code?
13. What are the housing arrangements?
14. What types of benefits are provided?
15. Is there a specific work station?

The answers to the above and other questions will allow you to acquire a general understanding of the kind of host environment you prefer. This will also assist you in the next phase of this selection process which is to compare various intern positions.

Step #3: Review Selective Intern Positions. Based on the initial information required, review all the appropriate internship positions, rank order and generate a priority listing, and choose the position that heads the list upon which attention can be focused. This is achieved by seeking a clearly defined description of each particular intern environment you are considering and using these descriptions to identify the advantages and disadvantages of each internship position. Then, consider the qualifications of the existing personnel in the position you would assume in order to determine the level of compatibility of the internship position with your goals. This contributes to a focused

search effort and allows the student to negotiate with the host organization from an informed position.

Step #4: Develop the terms of the Internship. Once you have selected and applied for a specific intern position, secure an interview date with the host organization and develop a strategy for the interview meeting. Prepare a portfolio to bring to the interview. Prior to the interview, generate a list of questions you want to ask, and anticipate questions you will be asked. Your interview questions should confirm the information previously acquired relative to specific tasks associated with the intern position, such as, is the intern considered the same as, or different from, counterpart staff? Does the intern work the same number of hours per week as counterpart staff? Are the policies regarding monetary compensation for interns different from that of regular staff? Tactfully inquire about the credentials of the intern supervisor and secretarial/administrative support in order to clarify your duties relative to the entire organization. This information can also facilitate the development of your performance evaluation criteria.

If you or the host organization feel your skills and abilities are better suited elsewhere, then return to Step #3, choose the next position that now heads the list and negotiate with that host organization. Once you have successfully negotiated the terms of the internship with a host organization, the next step is to intern.

Step #5: Intern. This is the experience. The extent to which you as an intern are incorporated into the "system" depends largely on your ability and your interpersonal skills. As an intern, practice diplomacy, but, be assertive; take charge. The success of your intern experience should be judged on your ability to contribute both to the host organization and to your own personal development. It is important to recognize the value of your contributions as an intern. You, as an intern, will be required to apply your knowledge, theory and subject expertise to practical client situations. Interns are routinely regarded as regular staff and, therefore, can expect to be assigned to different development teams with different supervisors or team leaders; or to multiple projects.

As sometimes happens, reality does not meet expectations. In one case, the primary responsibility of the intern was to develop and conduct two pilot courses and then to implement the actual courses during the next cycle, pending evaluation of the pilot courses. Shortly after the intern arrived at the host organization the project was canceled. The intern was reassigned. In another case, the intern's supervisor was applying for transfer to another division. The supervisor was the only full-time counterpart staff person in the same division as the intern. The supervisor's transition process caused voids in the intern-supervisor relationship. The intern demonstrated flexibility and adjusted accordingly.

Step #6: Post Internship Review. This is the final phase of the selection process. This phase provides closure to the internship experience. There are two major functions that should be done to close the internship experience: (1) perform a summative evaluation of your internship experience, and (2) debrief.

The summative evaluation should consist of two brief reports. The first report is completed by the intern's supervisor and submitted to the host organization's personnel department with a copy given to the intern and another copy sent to the intern's major advisor back on campus. The second report is completed by the intern and submitted to the host organization's personnel department with a copy given to the intern's supervisor and another copy presented to the intern's major advisor on campus. These brief reports must be honest, candid and confidential. The effectiveness of these reports depend on them being informative and detailed. Each report should contain examples of specific actions, tasks or incidents. This provides an accurate record of the internship experience for future reference.

Many successful internship experiences will reshape the thinking of the student or modify the career expectations of the student, thus, influencing the way in which the individual interacts with professionals in academic or business environs. Upon completion of the internship, the intern needs to make the transition back to being a student, otherwise,

the intern must make a conscious decision, and take deliberate action, not to transform back to being a student. Either way, debrief!

There are a variety of effective debriefing methods with which you may be familiar, however, we recommend a two-pronged debriefing method. First, meet with your major advisor immediately upon return to campus and discuss your internship experience in detail. Elaborate on the information contained in the summative evaluations and be as candid and frank as possible. Second, present a summary of your internship experience to an informal gathering of your colleagues in a seminar type fashion. Remain objective (which may be difficult) as you answer questions from the group and avoid lengthy explanations - or excuses. Offer your opinion when requested and avoid confusing fact with perception. Seek comments and opinions from the group at the end of your question and answer period about the image you projected during your summary presentation. Be prepared for unexpected comments. These debriefing actions will provide the self-reflection necessary for you to objectively judge the merits of your internship experience.

Discussion

Additional variables to consider when selecting an internship, such as using the internship as a culminating experience, or completing prerequisites to the internship, or accountability for course work hours, or continuity of the student's academic program, may vary from one academic institution to the next. For academic programs that utilize a variety of culminating experiences for degree completion, such as a thesis, a project or a comprehensive examination, an internship can also serve as such a culminating experience. The student benefits from the practical experience of applying theory while at the same time increasing the marketability of herself or himself.

Prerequisites for an off-campus internship can include an on-campus internship or freelance consulting or the satisfactory completion of a course that focuses on consulting and management skills. Course work hour accountability can be achieved in a variety of ways. A proven method is for the student and the advisor to outline the expectations prior

to the internship, for the advisor to have limited and uninhibited contact with the student during the internship and for the student to return after the internship with physical evidence of her or his on-the-job performance. A portfolio of non-proprietary materials produced at the host organization as a direct result of the student's efforts, and a written summary of the intern experience should suffice. Examples of prior development work ranks high in both academia and business when being considered for hire in higher education or private enterprise (Branch, Moore & Sherman, 1989).

A major academic concern for most students who intern off campus is the lack of faculty contact and subsequent loss of continuity back on campus. The interruption of work on a final project, masters thesis or doctoral dissertation can often extend the student's academic program of study. If the internship is not directly related to the student's research interests, reading time devoted to relevant literature is relatively limited. Summer internships alleviate some of these concerns, however, summer intern programs are usually much more competitive. Thus, deciding when to intern is a contributing factor when selecting an internship.

Private enterprise and academia are two markedly contrasting entities. Identifying your career goals and seeking relevant information will allow you to make an informed internship selection. Once you have selected a position you believe will satisfy your needs, develop a relationship with the host organization. Then, intern; and intern well. A selection strategy is important, but your performance as an intern is even more important. Whether you desire an internship experience that affords you opportunities to practice theoretical concepts, or you are primarily seeking an invitation for hire, the final decision rests with you. Once you have established a relationship with a host organization and all academic prerequisites have been satisfied, let the internship begin.

References

Branch, R. C., Moore, D. M., & Sherman, T. M. (1988). Evaluating potential instructional technology and design professionals for employment in academic and business settings: The criteria for decision making. Educational Technology, 29(10), 34 - 37.

Snyder, D. (1984). On being an intern. Performance and Instruction Journal, May, 18 - 19.